

# Huntsville Atari™ Users Group

Volume 5  
Issue 10

The newsletter  
still reads  
like yours

August 1987

An Independent Users Group Not Connected With Atari, Corp.

Home  
in Time



And Time  
beautiful  
Tennessee Valley

## FROM YOUR EDITOR.....

I am starting on my fourth year as newsletter editor with this edition. Time does fly! I don't count last July, as Lamarr was still listed as editor on the July 84 issue and I only helped(?). I bought my first computer in Feb of 83, an Atari 800. I was thinking about buying an Apple II plus because that is what I was programming and using at work at the time. Thank goodness I was talked into Atari. There are several at work that got Apple II's for that same reason and all agree they are sorry they did.

It is still six months away, but it is not too early to start making plans for the 1988 IEEE Computer Faire. This year we should have four tables. We will need the full line of Atari equipment and "DEMO PROGRAMS" for both 8-bit and STs. We will also need people to man the tables on both Friday and Saturday. We had the best user group turnout of all systems last year, so lets do even better this year.

I will say it again! I need 8-bit inputs to the news letter. Otherwise it is going to stay heavy on ST items. I use my ST most of the time now, so my own interest in the 8-bits is low.

Per the June 27 TV Computer Cronicals and ZMAGS8: Commodore is having lots more troubles. The PC clones are not selling at all, and Commodore now has a suit against Rattigen (ex CEO) for \$15 MIL as he was the one who brought the clones to the US and Commodore claims the clones have lost them \$5 MIL in profits.

If you get a chance, take a look at the August Compute!, 12 pages on the CES and CONOEX. Excellent coverage of everything. If someone tells you that the new XF 551, tri density, double sided (in double density) 8-bit disk drive, will load 2.9 times faster than the 1050, don't believe them. Atari says it is rated 50% faster with ADOS, which is still within the 19.2K baud of the serial port. The new drive has the same drive UNIT as the new Atari PC clones and the drive UNIT can read 2.9 times or more faster. If it were possible to exceed the bus speed with a drive mod, I am sure Atari would have done it. At one time they were trying to get 31K baud out of the serial port, but could not do it. With a possible parallel port adapter (see a following article), the XF 551 would really be a hot drive. If such a device would do full track buffering, you would have the same read speed as the ST. The 18 sectors at 256 bytes per sector double density, is the same as the 9 sectors at 512 bytes per sector as the ST.

If the new ROMs Atari is making available to developers are the same as what are in the MEGA STs and with the blitters, a lot of people may be in for a disappointment. They seem to be less than 100% compatible. The GFA compiled game STONEAGE and the later version will not run on either the new OS or old disk OS. (And this is the ONLY game for the ST that I like. When I swapped mother boards with a developer to get 1 meg, I also ended up with his new roms. He wanted my unmodified board so he could do an easy upgrade to several meg and did not want the new roms until the blitter is available.) The old disk operating system is not the answer as it is not 100% compatible with some newer programs. Looks like Atari may have to come out with a translator disk for the ST to help users who have programs that were written making calls to memory

locations that Atari told developers not to use. The same type of problem exists with the newest double density disk drives. They will not read tracks 81 and 82. Therefore, some copy protected disks will not run on them.

The IBM emulator, PC-DITTO is top notch. Per reports in other newsletters and local reports, it will run everything tried but BasicA and Jet. It rates at 30% cpu speed of the 4.77 megHz IBM. Slow, but then for \$90 you are not going to get a full color \$900 IBM clone.

SKELETON KEY is out there and coming. It is a partial solution for hard disk owners. It simply deprotects the disk, then you can place it on the hard drive. It reportedly can only do about 80% at present. ST HAPPY is a cartridge that fits into the ST cart slot and will let you to make a mirror image of any disk you put into your ST drive, whether the drive is 3.5 of a 5.25 modified. Or in other words, your ST drive will be able to read and write any format, any size, any computer, and almost any program! Would that make you happy? Manhattan Graphics of NYC is porting Macintosh's hottest desktop program, READY, SET, GO!, to the ST in mid-september ..... W\*ACE, July 87 by Marilyn Merica.

There is to be NO MEGA 1. The 1040 ST is going to stay the 1 Meg Machine. The new 520 ST will look like like the 1040 ST, but with only 512K ram and a single sided drive. The current one will stay in production for a time. Don't think you will be able to upgrade by just inserting the extra ram chips. While the new 520 and 1040 boards are the same they are wave soldered and the holes for the extra chips are therefore solder filled.

The new XE game machines are to be well advertised starting late this September. The TV ads are to be on local TV, not national, so don't expect to see them here in Huntsville. The XEs should sell well for Christmas, and create a new interest in the 8-bit Atari computers. This should get Atari back in the mainstream. The Atari name and logo (for a price) is also going on a line of pocket and desk top calculators made by another company. The 8-bit line is to be the TOYS - R - US, etc. line, and the STs are to be the specialty, computer and music (MIDI) store only line. I have read that JT is grooming son Sam to take over from him and I suspect Sam has some new more up to date ideas on how to run the company. Atari has less than 1500 outlets in the US and needs at least 5000 to make a strong showing. So they are really going to have to make a lot of changes to get the retailers back in the fold.

(Mid June 1987 - GENIE) Here are some often asked questions, and their answers about Atari products courtesy of Neil Harris of the Atari Corporation..

Q: When will the new products be shipping?

A: The XEP-80 and the SX212 (80-column for 8-bit and the new modem, respectively) will begin manufacturing any moment now for delivery around the end of June. The Mega ST 2 and Mega ST 4 are already on the way to Europe and are scheduled for North American delivery in early July. The Atari PC is also due in early July.

Q: What about the blitter chip upgrade?

A: It should be available for current ST owners around September. It will cost around \$120. The final form of the upgrade is not yet set -- it may involve a board swap rather than an add-on.

Q: What about PC emulators for the ST?

A: Both Atari's own software emulator and one called PC-Ditto should be released during the summer. A hardware emulator is still in the works for later on.

Q: When will new ROMs be available for the ST and what changes are included?

A: The ROMs are done and have gone into production. Availability as a separate item may take a while, though -- we need ROMs for the Mega ST. These ROMs support the hardware blitter (optional) and fix some TOS problems, like the infamous underline bug and the RS232 handshaking. Parts of the system have been sped up, like character output. A list of exact changes will be posted shortly.

Q: What's happening with the 8-bit emulator?

A: The author finally agreed to release the source code to the public domain, so Atari will allow him to



distribute it along with our ROM code. Now we want to see you hackers out there work to speed it up -- at the moment it is only 1/4 the speed of an 8-bit.

Q: What else is new at Atari?

A: On the business side things are great. We just announced a 2-for-1 stock split, effective next week. New TV commercials have been produced for the ST (yay!) and the video games. We are also working on campaigns to support MIDI music and desktop publishing.

Back at the fort..... I have been told that PC-Ditto is an excellent emulator. Runs at 30% of IBM PC speed but works with every program tried; all the top of the line. Because of the faster disk and screen I/O, it seems about as fast as the IBM. The slowness shows up when you do things like recalculate a spread sheet. Someone in town has a copy. I have read that the 8-bit Atari Transformer for the ST will run an un-copyprotected version of PaperClip. However, the translator is only a 48K version. To make it a 130XE would have slowed it down way too much. It is only at 25% speed for now.

There is an article in the July S.P.A.C.E. from Harrisburg, PA, which tells about an 800 Cartridge Emulator for the ST. It is by Steve Jones of Jonesware, P.O. Box 7037, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055. It will use Atari ROMs like the Magic Sac. It has a left cartridge slot and runs faster than the software emulator, i.e., 70% as fast as the 800. No comment about Atari basic. Goal is to have a special serial port cable to allow use of 1050 drives and the 850 interface. Will also allow use of the ST drives and extra ram as it is Axalon compatible. Steve is also working on a FRANKLIN (Apple clone) and Commodore emulators in a cartridge. May be here this Christmas for \$50 plus ROMs. Sounds nice.

#### HAPPY IBM FILE CONVERTER

Bill Aycock

ZMAG59

Still looking for a way to transfer files between your Atari and your IBM machine? If you have a Happy-enhanced 1050 disk drive, you're in luck!

I just received in the mail today Revision 7.10 of Happy's Warp Speed Software. One of the claims made for this revision was a "feature that allows converting files to and from IBM PC format using the HAPPY 1050 ENHANCEMENT."

After a very brief test, I can say that this feature works! The steps are pretty simple:

1. Format a SINGLE-SIDED disk in your IBM, using the command 'FORMAT A:1'.

2. Copy the IBM files onto this disk.

3. Boot your Atari with a Warp Speed DOS, and run the program IBMXFR.AUT which is on the back side of the distribution disk. Make sure you have an Atari-format disk handy!

4. Select a few options, such as translation of CR/LF to EOL, then tell the program to copy from IBM to Atari.

That's it! Swap disks as directed, and the file you choose is copied from IBM format to Atari format. Going from Atari to IBM works much the same way. This should work for any kind of file, but is most useful for text files. Or, you could download Atari programs on an IBM, then transfer them to an Atari disk to run them.

As I said, my test was very brief. I'll do some more testing later and try to time how fast the program runs. If you have any questions, let me know!

#### QUBIE'S MODEM MODEM

ZMAG63 By: Alan Roseman

QUBIE' SUPER MODEM 1200 EXTERNAL, FROM QUBIE, 507 Calle San Pablo, Camarillo, Ca. 93010, 800-821-4479. Delivered Price \$99.00

The QUBIE' SUPER 1200E is a standard size external modem (5"x9"), it's outer case is made of steel in a painted finish. It's face is a contrasting dark brown. The face of the QUBIE' SUPER 1200E displays a full array of informational LED's. HS-high speed, AA-auto answer, CO-carrier detected, OH-off hook, RO-receive data,

SO-send data, TR-terminal ready, MR-modem ready. Immediately left of the LED's is a small slide open compartment which houses the 8 DIP switches making for easy access.

The rear of the QUBIE' SUPER 1200E offers you access to it's RS-232C port, an on off switch, speaker volume control, telephone and power input.

As you can probably tell from the description the QUBIE' SUPER 1200E is a very well equipped package. It has all the features we have come to appreciate in a top quality modem. Did I mention yet that it auto switches from 1200 to 300 baud on connect if necessary? Well it does that too.

The QUBIE' SUPER 1200E accepts all standard HAYES commands, I have used it on all local BBS's as well as the major pay to connect information services. It has performed in an error free fashion in every case.

The documentation is complete and easy to understand even for the novice. The QUBIE' SUPER 1200E comes as a bundled package with IBM software "PC TALK" making it a real bargain for big blue fans.

Delivery which is via UPS is free and takes approx. six days. For about six dollars they will ship express which cuts delivery to about three days.

You probably haven't heard of the QUBIE' Co. Well neither had I. I was put on to them by a friend who told me that QUBIE' doesn't advertise in the ATARI mags. They seem to stick with the PC related publications. That, I'm afraid, is a loss for both us and the QUBIE' Co.

When I ordered my modem I made a point of telling the salesperson that out in the world are many varied micro users, they would only help their own cause by addressing a wider selection of us.

When you are writing a product review and begin to sound like a shill for the product in question it sends out a clear message. This is a product which defies you to find fault. Whether you look at the price \$99.00, or the product integrity.

I give QUBIE' SUPER 1200E my highest recommendation. This is an opportunity for computer users to get the best of both worlds. A great product at a great price.

#### CONVERT DATA STATEMENTS TO STRINGS

By Levin Soule' - May 85 MAUG NL

This is a demo of a simple way to convert DATA statements to a string. Where it can be used, it will save memory, program startup time and speed loading. When run, it will create line 32000. To make that line a part of the program, just move the cursor over that line and press RETURN. Now list the program, and you will have made the DATA statements into a string. If you have over 100 DATA statements to read you will have to make two or more strings, using several lines, and have your program put the strings together into one long string. You will have to select your own line numbers and set the size of the FOR NEXT loop to suit your needs. You could use it as is and change the line numbers and variable names after each run. Forced screen reading can be used, but this way is about as simple to use as there is. Also, remember that you will have less lines to delete from your program if you keep it short. If you use it several times in a row, don't forget to delete the DIM statement after the first RUN or GOTO, and also use GOTO 30000 for all following uses. CHR\$(34) must be used as shown, as a " can't be part of a string, but must be present when the line is printed to the screen. Try it. You'll like it! However, if your code contains a 34, you got a problem. It's not hard to correct. Just replace the number 34 with an easy to spot, unused number. Then locate it's position(s) in the string and use AS(??,??)=CHR\$(34) as a line(s) in your program to make the correction(s) while you are putting the string(s) together.

```
30000 REM LIST'D:STRINGER.LST"
30010 DIM AS(119):TRAP 30050:
GRAPHICS 0:RESTORE 30050
30020 AS = "32000" :AS(6) = "AS="
:AS(9)= CHR$(34) :FOR X=1 TO 100
```



```

30030 READ A:IF (A>26)*(A<32)+(A>124)*
      (A<128)+(A>155)*(A<160)+(A>252)
      THEN A$(LEN(A$)+1)=CHR$(27)
30035 REM see Apr 86 NL for comments
      on how the logical operators in
      line 30030 work.
30040 A$(LEN(A$)+1)=CHR$(A):NEXT X
30050 A$(LEN(A$)+1)=CHR$(34):POSITION
      2,10: ? A$: ? :END
30060 DATA 104,104,104,10,10,10,10,1
      70,169,7,157,66,3,104,157,69,3
      ,104,157,68,3,104,157,73,3
30070 DATA 104,157,72,3,32,86,228,13
      2,212,160,0,132,213,96

```

There are several code numbers that will not print to the screen without being preceded by ESCAPE. They are 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 125, 126, 127, 156, 157, 158, 159, 253, 254, and 255. Therefore you must add 27, before every one of these numbers to get it to screen print correctly. The added 27s will not be in the code printed to the screen. I used this procedure to produce the line of code for the following programs. Works like a charm!

#### DATA RETRIEVAL BY USR CALL

By Levin Soule' - May 86 HAUG NL

The above DATA is the code from the November 1983 COMPUTE!, for a fast load routine that can be used to save a block of memory, such as a GRAPHICS 0 screen, or load a block of memory. To save to disk A\$(10,10) must = 11. To read from a disk A\$(10,10) must be = 7, as shown in line 30060 above.

```

0 REM This saves a screen.
10 DIM A$(39):GOSUB 32000
20 OPEN #1,8,0,"D:GR0.DAT":A$(10,10)=
  CHR$(11)
30 START=PEEK(88)+256*PEEK(89)
40 Y=USR(ADR(A$),1,START,40*24)
50 CLOSE #1: IF Y<>1 THEN PRINT "ERROR
  ":Y
60 END
32000 A$=(A$ created by STRINGER.LST)
32010 RETURN

```

```

0 REM This loads a screen.
10 DIM A$(39):GOSUB 32000
20 OPEN #1,4,0,"D:GR0.DAT":A$(10,10)=
  CHR$(7)
30 START=PEEK(88)+256*PEEK(89)
40 Y=USR(ADR(A$),1,START,40*24)
50 CLOSE #1:END
32000 A$=(A$ created by STRINGER.LST)
32010 RETURN

```

The USR call is as follows:

```
Y=USR(ADR(A$),CHANNEL,ADR(FILES),LEN(FILES))
```

For more information on the operation of this routine, go to the library and check page 298 of the November 1983 COMPUTE! Within limits, (remember ESCAPE) the following demo program will load any text file, print it to the screen and tell you how many bytes long it was. You can make FSIZE any size you want. To make it write to disk, change FAST\$(10,10) to 11, the 4 in line 40 to 8, READ in line 30 to WRITE, FSIZE to the length of A\$, and delete lines 60 through 100. Add line 60 END. The code will save A\$ to disk.

```

0 REM SAVE"D:RETRIEVE.BAS
10 GRAPHICS 0:FSIZE=10000:DIM FAST$
  (39),A$(FSIZE),FNAME$(15),FILES(12)
20 A$(1)="*":A$(FSIZE)="*":A$(2)=A$
  :Z=0:GOSUB 30000
30 ? "NAME OF FILE TO READ":INPUT
  FILES:FNAME$="D":FNAME$(3)=FILES
40 OPEN #1,4,0,FNAME$:TRAP 60
50 Y=USR(ADR(FAST$),1,ADR(A$),FSIZE)

```

```

60 Z=PEEK(40)+256*PEEK(41):REM Z is
  the file length.
70 A$(Z)=A$(Z,Z)
80 IF Y=136 THEN ? A$: ? "END OF FILE"
  : ? Z: " BYTES":END
90 IF Y=1 THEN ? A$: ? "RETURNING TO
  GET REMAINDER OF FILE":GOTO 50
100 ? "DISK I/O ERROR #":Y:END
30000 RESTORE 30001:FOR I=1 TO 39:READ
  A:FAST$(LEN(FAST$)+1)=CHR$(A)
  :NEXT I:RETURN
30001 DATA 104,104,104,10,10,10,10,170
  ,169,7,157,66,3,104,157,69,3,104
  ,157,68,3,104,157,73,3
30002 DATA 104,157,72,3,32,86,228,132
  ,212,160,0,132,213,96

```

You could replace lines 30000, 30001, 30002 with a FAST\$ line created by using STRINGER.LST as was done before. This last routine could be used to print a long instruction file to the screen, yet take less memory than one screen requires. You would have to make the file with a wordprocessor and have your program call it using the above routine. You would have to change FSIZE to a number that would fit the screen and add a dummy INPUT statement before each read, ie., in line 90 just before the GOTO 50. You would also want to change the statement about getting the rest of the file to "PRESS RETURN TO CONTINUE". I used this to read a text file and it works great. Another use would be to provide instructions for a program whenever the HELP key is pressed, without using program memory. It should also be able to load graphics screens. However, I am sure changes would be needed. Have not tried that.

#### CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

of the

HUNTSVILLE ATARI USERS GROUP

HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

#### ARTICLE III -- MEMBERSHIP

Section 2(2). Dues shall be paid annually, the amount to be recommended by the Board of Directors and voted on by the membership at the December meeting. The amount to be paid shall be due on January first, and prorated dues may be set by the Board of Directors for a part of the year.

Change to:

Section 2(2). Dues shall be paid annually. The Board of Directors may recommend a change in the amount of dues, which recommendation is to be published in the club's newsletter and voted upon at the next General Meeting by the membership, after publication. Said change in dues will become effective immediately upon receiving a majority vote of those members present.

#### MORE ON Discache

by Levin Soule'

I have now learned how to get STWRITER to work with Discache!!! It does speed things up a good bit (like 200 or more times under some conditions!). I left the MEDRZ2.PRG in the Auto folder, then added STSHELL.PRG from the December 86 COMPUTE!'s Atari ST to the AUTO folder. All other files were removed. I put the AUTOLOG.BAT, SP33K.TTP printer spooler, STWRITER.PRG and the CACHE.TTP files in the main directory. The first AUTOLOG.BAT file I used loads a 63K printer spooler (33K is default), creates a 100K cache for drive A and loads STWRITER.PRG is as follows:

```

CLS
plot 12 30
ECHO LOADING SPOOLER
A:\SP33K.TTP 63
CLS
plot 12 31
ECHO LOADING CACHE

```



A:\CACHE.TTP 100 A  
CLS  
plot 12 29  
ECHO LOADING STWRITER  
A:\STWRITER.PRg

It works like a charm! The Amgem Inc./Discache people need to put these kinds of examples in their instruction book or on the disk. A person new to computing could have a bit of trouble setting up Discache with some programs. I have several years of use and programing behind me and had some trouble at first. However, the instructions are very easy to follow once you get the hang of what is going on.

If you replace the commands to load STWRITER with EXIT you will go to the desk top. In this way it should work with other programs. If you are using the STARTGEM.PRg, place it in place of A:\STWRITER.PRg and add the needed .INF file to the main directory. However, Discache still goes not write through to the disk as it should with any of my random access database programs. I did find that when I do a lot of record changing, it does start to write through after several records have been edited. Too me, not writing through after every record save, as it does without the cache, is a bug. Correct this one bug and include on the disk a lot of example setup files for the most popular productivity programs and Discache would be a highly useful, easy to setup program.

Discache really adds some nice features to STWRITER. I can still backup save my STWRITER files by just changing disks before each save and Discache detects the change as it should and writes the file correctly to the new disk. WARNING!!! When you switch disks, the cache for that drive is cleaned out!!! It would be better to use a disk in a second drive. If you want the cache to work on the B drive, you also have to set up a separate cache for that drive. The cache also gives a GREAT speed-up to reading the directory after the first read. And the first read is also a lot faster if you are using a disk with a lot of files, like 30 or more. A test bare drive FIRST index read of 71 files took 77 seconds. With the cache it was only 18 seconds! It is not claimed to work that way, but it does. The name of the 71st file reads in just as fast as the 1st file name. It seems to do a form of directory input buffering. Think of what that could do for a hard disk! It might even help speedup a BBS. With a large cache active, I can load and modify several files, and then go back and reload or merge them in a flash. This would be a great help when you were extracting several parts from one or more files to merge into other files. It is almost like having a wordprocessor with many files in memory at the same time. If for some reason I need to QUIT STWRITER and return, the reload of STWRITER takes under a second. With a meg of ram, I use a cache of 500K.

With a large cache, I can access a program in the second drive, run it, and then return to STWRITER in a flash. However, there are limits as to just how far you can go with this.

Discache also works great with THUNDER. There is no noticeable change on the first run through, but it then makes checking for errors missed or overlooked on your first run VERY fast and easy. I hit the ignore key too fast at times and I can't go back. The problem last month was my not understanding what the documentation was saying and just what was going on when running it with THUNDER.

I used the cache to help print a new copy of the ballet's mailing list of 2807 records (a 375K file for 3000 records). Total continuous disk run time was reduced to 9 minutes from a non-cache continuous run time of 1 hour 35 minutes (the time it takes to load, sort and print the file on an old Genini-10). Now that I have a meg of RAM, I did the same thing with less then two minutes of disk run time TOTAL by revising the program and using a ramdisk, but with Discache I don't have to revise. However, I am going to stay with the old cache

version for file safety reasons. The more I use it the more I like it, even with its one bug! And I bet that will turn out to be only a line or two of code that needs changing.

I can now say that Discache is WELL worth buying. is also an outstanding reason to upgrade to a meg of RAM or more.

(While working on this newsletter on the 15 July, I received a call from Amgem, Inc. to discuss my Discache comments in the last newsletter about the bug. It is going to be looked at, as the man said Discache should have written though to the disk after every changed record save. He was also very interested in how it improved the performance of STwriter and more then surprised with the 100% speedup in writing to the disk I got. He is going to be even more surprised at the FIRST read speedup in index reading I get with STwriter (77 down to 18 sec for 71 files!). That is not claimed to happen. They do not turn off write verify. They are working on Discache Plus, but don't let that slow you in buying it now.)

#### ZMAGAZINE JUNE 22, 1987 ISSUE 58 HARDWARE UPDATE

By:Ed Chop

Did you know that Atari made two 1050 drives? The newer drives are Tandem drives and the older drives are WST (World Storage Technologies). It seems that the WST drives are quieter and more reliable, but the belts are more expensive. The WST drives are generally not marked as to manufacturer, but they have NOVACON motors.

What about these cheap 50 drives you see advertised in Computer Shopper all the time? Can you use them on your Atari? Well .... yes .... and no. You can't use them without modifying the drive or your computer.

By adding a microprocessor and interface circuits to the drive you could probably get it to work with your Atari just like a 1050. But an easier way may be to take the mechanical drive assembly from the cheap drive and wire it to the 1050 electronics. And why go through a this trouble? Because the cheap drive that you want to buy should be gear-driven. They are MUCH quieter and reliable. According to Bob Wooley, from the Computer Atari Sig Community, the drive must be one that draws less power than the original. Bob says that you may burn up your driver transistors, although he hasn't tried it himself, yet.

Another way would be to add a PIO to your computer. That's a parallel I/O adapter. Mmmmmmm...sounds interesting, huh? Well it seems our friend Bob Wooley is working on such a project. The PIO board will plug into the PIO port in the XL with a 24" cable. The information for building the PIO will be available on the Atari Sig when he has it completed. By adding the proper controller chip to the PIO, you can run the new drive with your Atari. But Bob has a better idea. How about a parallel 1050 drive that can load a disk in 10 seconds? Got your attention, huh? Well, he has an interface card planned that will plug into the PIO to run your 1050. That, too, will be available on the Atari Sig. We'll be looking forward to that hardware project.

What's Atari doing to enhance their drives? Well, to start with, Bill Wilkinson is working on a new DOS called A-DOS. Although originally planned for the promised 3.5 inch disk, now scrapped, A-DOS is being designed for a new DD 5.25" drive from Atari

CAVEAT EMPTOR... Yet Again!

by Hank Lay

Beware of START "magazine"!!

I'm one of many who invested too much money, time and brain energy in my Atari 8-bit collection(s) to throw it all away when the ST series came along. My kids grew up with access to the stuff and only wanted to play games, I can't even give them any of the real goodies! I didn't want to be left behind by the ST, though, especially when (silly me) I thought I could build a business and help HAUG members by selling ATARI goods at competitive discount prices.



Therefore, I elected to personally support both 8-bit and ST lines as long as I could. Of course, this meant double the time, effort, and space for collections of whatever "support" came along. I quickly found that:

- (1) More than double was available, and
- (2) I simply couldn't afford the time, effort, space, and money for twice the books and magazines, especially those that split their Atari coverage into two separate issues.

I recognize that one magazine can have trouble trying to cover too many machines (that's what ruined COMPUTE!, in my opinion) but one Atari mag with both 8-bit and ST sections (a la A.N.A.L.O.G. seems to be doing OK, so I didn't run out and subscribe to all of the new ST stuff when it came out.

I especially can't afford to subscribe to the disk versions of all these magazines, even though they do save time. There's just so much in the kitty. My dealership used to make the hobby almost self-sufficient, but no more, since Atari continues to stick it to us small dealers, despite their promises to the contrary. Even if I could find the money for disk versions, I don't have enough time to make use (i.e. justify the expense) of the material in them. If I really need something in a magazine, I can read the article and then either make time to type in the software or wait several months until it becomes available in the club library. Note the precedent: it has become common practice to print type-able code in the issue in question, except for certain "bonus" programs for disk subscribers only that are mouth-wateringly described for the rest of us (a dastardly practice, in my view).

Despite my misgivings, I do pick up an ST-only magazine at a newsstand now and then. I've noticed in the past year or so that some have only been available with disk, and have quickly ignored them due to the price. Last week I spotted START from ANTIC in a non-disk version for the first time. Even though it was the most expensive non-disk mag on the shelf, a look at the Contents page convinced me to give it a try. What a mistake! This one is a real rip-off, as it is of no use without the disk. There's no indication of this up-front, it looks much like other mags. In view of the aforementioned precedent, I feel it's a misleading trap. I may have seen an ad describing START as a disk-only publication in the past, but as I said, such things are soon forgotten. In the fine print, this issue of START is billed as a "service" to those who want to read first and get the disk later! Come on, fellas, gimme a break! What else can you call it but an elaborate ad for the disk, which incidentally costs \$2 more than if you bought the \$15 disk version at the newsstand in the first place! How can ANTIC justify an extra \$2 for "shipping and handling"; the merchant doesn't add anything to the cover price, and he still makes a profit, then ANTIC makes HIS profit plus their own when they sell the disk later by mail. I'll tell you how by getting away with it! Everybody knows that "shipping and handling" is often a thinly disguised rip-off, but here's ANTIC eliminating one or more levels of distribution and profit sharing and wanting even more money. They've learned in the past few years that there is real money to be had in mail order software; look at how much of a \$4 8-bit/ST issue is devoted to advertising their own sales.

Years ago in model railroading I learned a truth that seems to hold for most any endeavor: as long as it is within his means, a novice will pick up anything he can get his hands on, out of the fear of missing-out on something important to his understanding or enjoyment of the activity. Most of us, me too, are novices in computing, which accounts for the enormous proliferation of computing books and magazines. It seems there will always be someone to take undue advantage of the novice's "needs". I feel it's bad enough for these publishers to want to double their sales at our expense, but it adds insult to injury to feed on our gullibility with products that one can only use by spending over 3 times more!

I've made no attempt to judge the actual value of a

disk issue of START. The material may well be worth the \$15 (or \$17) it costs, or even much more for some people/purposes. My objection is to the way it's marketed. In the marketplace with which we are all familiar, magazine buying is quite different from software buying. Mags are a potpourri of varied subjects, while a person typically buys a piece of software for a specific purpose (and for a higher price). Some computer mag publishers seem to be blurring this distinction on purpose to increase sales. In my view, if \$15 a crack is the only way I can get some of this useful material, then START should be honest and admit that the "magazine" is only a shell for selling their real product; go monthly and change the title to "Software-of-the-Month Club" at \$120 to \$180 a year (INCLUDING "Shipping and Handling"). In any case, they should get rid of the phony "service" of selling a \$4 copy of START as though it were a useful item by itself.

#### Atari Amateur Radio Interaction

by Ed Glambotski

From SLO-POKES

The question often comes up: what else can we do with our Atari computer besides games? Perhaps we pose that question in an attempt to justify having a home computer. On the other hand, it may be a continuing challenge and excuse to play with these expensive toys. Regardless of the personal drive, Packet Radio is another fun utility for the computer. What is Packet Radio, you ask? Well, let me lay it on you.

Packet Radio is a utility whereby the computer interacts with an amateur radio transceiver. Don't stop reading because you are not a Ham radio operator, because this is technologically interesting in the work a computer does for you when thus programmed. Packet Radio is a fancy form of radio-teletype. It requires your Atari computer, a packet control unit (called TNC, and commercially available at a number of third party companies), and an amateur transceiver. A disk drive and a Printer are helpful, but not essential. Packet Radio gets its name from the fact that each transmission consists of a "packet" of digital data, including call signs of the originating station, the destination station, and any relaying stations in between.

There's virtually no interference. When you're connected with someone, your TNC will recognize and interpret only those packets addressed to you. You'll hear the others going by, but nothing will show on your screen. Since each packet is a brief burst, there's room in between your packets for the packets of other stations. So, one frequency can support several messages simultaneously (time sharing). The TNC will also ignore any packet that doesn't "add up right". Part of the coding in each packet is a "checksum" that your computer reads. If the packet is garbled in any way the checksum will be wrong and your TNC will refuse it. Okay, now what do we do this lashup for?

All this adds up to a system for message transfer virtually error free for at least the following tasks:

- \*Packet Bulletin Board Systems of any distance, leaving out Ma Bell (and her tab).

- \*Electronic Mail - sent/received - during these activities, you need not be at the station at the time of transmission. Emergency traffic (fire, earthquake, etc.) information can be sent error free.

- \*Up/downloading computer programs

In Summary, I might say the user can transfer information between stations without the need of the telephone system (twisted pair) at a baud rate of 9600.

Amateurs are using this means internationally now, and it is just a matter of time before CB Radio users take off with it also. (ED HAUG Sounds interesting. Now all I have to do is save up about \$300 for the TNC, talk the wife into letting me put up an antenna again, fix the receiver, fire up the old 100 watt and see what this is all about! I knew there was some reason to keep my license active. Lets see, the summer of '89 should be about right.)



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